Politics of the Urbanized Environment

ENV 684
Spring 2018
M/W 1:25-2:40
Environment Hall 1101

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This course examines the politics of environmental management in urban areas. In the United States and throughout the world, increasing shares of the population live in densely populated communities, creating environmental risks but also opportunities for more sustainable patterns of growth and development. Through their authority over infrastructure investment, land use regulation, and public service delivery, local governments play a critical role in shaping the urbanized environment. By the logic of decentralized governance, local governments should be most responsive to community preferences. Yet very often, local decision making serves to degrade the environment and local residents’ quality of life. We will seek to understand these decisions in the context of local democratic governance and assess the prospects for more sustainable outcomes in the future.

The course is divided into two sections. First we will examine the literature on urban politics to understand how political institutions, economic imperatives, and social inequalities shape and constrain local decision making. Then we will explore how these factors influence the management of specific environmental challenges and the development of more sustainable cities. Course material will emphasize U.S. cities. Readings will include theoretical material about urban politics, empirical research on the effectiveness of city efforts to address environmental problems, and case studies of particular approaches.

The course material assumes a basic familiarity with the organization and operation of American government. If you have little background in American government or if you would like to refresh your knowledge, I will hold an optional session on Wednesday, January 17, 4:30-5:30pm, in EH 1101 to cover the fundamentals.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students will gain an understanding of:

• The political, economic, and social constraints on local government decision making;
• The pathways by which local policy decisions shape environmental outcomes;
• Tools that local governments can use to improve environmental outcomes; and
• Conditions under which local governments are most able to use these tools.

Students will gain competencies in:
• Identifying opportunities for improved environmental outcomes in urban areas;
• Evaluating the political feasibility of specific environmental management strategies; and
• Developing management strategies and communicating about them in a way that is sensitive to diverse stakeholders in an urban political setting.

ASSIGNMENTS

Readings and Discussion (20% of course grade)
Participation in seminar discussion is mandatory. Seminar discussions will concentrate on the assigned readings, rigorously examining the theoretical and empirical contributions of each work. All students must be prepared to participate in these discussions. Complete all of the assigned readings and take time to reflect upon them prior to class.

Response Memos (20%)
Students are required to write a 500-700 word response to the readings at three assigned times over the semester. These short papers should not summarize the readings. The goal instead is to respond to some or all of the works; you might do this by comparing their questions or approaches, proposing an alternative hypothesis or argument, evaluating their research designs, discussing their connection to readings from previous weeks, or considering the implications of their findings for an applied environmental problem.

Public Meeting Memo (15%)
Each student will attend a public meeting that has a local environmental policy issue on the agenda. The meeting could be of a city council, county board of commissioners, city or county advisory commission, a regional agency such as a metropolitan planning organization, a neighborhood association, or a political body such as one of Durham’s political action committees. Write a 800-1,200 word memo that includes the name and date of the meeting, a summary of the policy being discussed and the specific decision being made, and a stakeholder analysis identifying who has interest in the decision, the nature of their interest, and a brief summary of the resources they may bring to bear in influencing the decision.

Applied Group Research Project (35%) and Oral Presentation (10%)
Students will work in small groups on a project developing a political strategy to address an environmental problem in a particular local jurisdiction. The project will include specific elements including an assessment of the status of the problem, a proposed policy solution, and a political and communication strategy to enact the policy. Project grades will have both individual- and group-level components.
DUKE COMMUNITY STANDARD

All activities of Nicholas School students, including those in this course, are governed by the Duke Community Standard.

Duke University is a community dedicated to scholarship, leadership, and service and to the principles of honesty, fairness, respect, and accountability. Citizens of this community commit to reflect upon and uphold these principles in all academic and nonacademic endeavors, and to protect and promote a culture of integrity.

To uphold the Duke Community Standard:
- I will not lie, cheat, or steal in my academic endeavors
- I will conduct myself responsibly and honorably in all my endeavors; and
- I will act if the Standard is compromised.

Proper citations in all papers submitted for this course are absolutely mandatory. For information on citing sources and avoiding plagiarism, see the library’s web site at https://plagiarism.duke.edu/. If you have questions about the Community Standard or citation practices, please consult with the instructor, the TAs, or the NSOE Communications Studio.

COURSE TOPICS

January 10. Introduction

January 15: MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

January 17. SNOW DAY

January 22: Is urbanization the cause of or solution to environmental problems?


– Understanding Local Politics –

January 24. What is urban?


January 29. The logic of decentralization


**January 31. Some consequences of decentralization**


**February 5. Who governs a city?**


**February 7. Conflict and representation**


**February 12. Machine politics**


Film in class: *Street Fight* (2005)

**February 14. Mayors and city councils**

February 19. City bureaucracy


February 21. Bureaucratic power


Film in class: The World That Moses Built (1989)

February 26. Prospects for regionalism


– Local Environmental Politics –

February 28. Growth, development, and displacement


March 5. Environmental justice in urban development


March 7. Economic development and green jobs


March 12 and 14: SPRING BREAK

March 19. Energy development


March 21. Green spaces


March 26. Urban water management


March 28. Transportation

Local transportation policy documents:
2. Executive Summary, Draft EIS, Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project.
3. Selection of NEPA Preferred Alternative (pp. FEIS-5 to FEIS-15), Final EIS, Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project.

April 2. Climate change mitigation policy


Durham GHG inventory and climate action plan

April 4. Local resilience and adaptation


April 9. Sustainable cities


April 11 and 16: Group project presentations

April 18: WRAP UP